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Journalism Education in Countries with Limited Media Freedom

EDITED BY Beate Josephi



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CHAPTER FOUR

PALESTINIAN MEDIA MAP: Production Congestion AND Consumption Dispersion

NIBAL THAWABTEH

Challenging Environment: Palestine

Population: 4,300,000

Freedom House score 2009: Not Free (NF), ranked 184 out of 195 countries

Events in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are covered extensively by international media, but both Israel and the Palestinian Authority severely restrict press freedom and often impede journalists' ability to report safely and accurately. Israel's army and security services continue to commit a range of press abuses. Journalists are subject to gunfire, physical abuse, arrest, and substantial limits on their freedom of movement. Further, journalists reporting from the Israeli-occupied territories are required to carry Israeli-issued press cards; for Palestinian journalists and Arab journalists more generally, these cards are very difficult to obtain. On the Palestinian side, the Palestinian Legislative Council's 2005 deliberations on a draft bill on access to information were stalled after legislative elections in January 2006 resulted in a victory for the Hamas. With the victory of Hamas, Palestinian media outlets have become targets of factional violence between Hamas and Fatah. Threats, arrests, and abuse of journalists deemed critical of the Palestinian Authority, the Fatah party, and the Hamas party, have become routine. Most independent media outlets exercise cautious self-censorship, particularly on the issue of internal Palestinian politics.

INTRODUCTION

The Palestinian media market can be described as crowded and fragmented. In Palestine, three daily Arabic newspapers are published, and one in English. In addition, there are more than 60 television and local radio stations, two news agencies, and many irregularly appearing magazines. Moreover, there is an official radio and television channel and two private satellite channels.

PRINT MEDIA

Newspapers

There are three daily newspapers published in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: *Al Quds* (Jerusalem), *Al Ayyam* (The Days), and *Al Haya Al Jadida* (The New Life). The weekly *Filastin* (Palestine) newspaper is issued in Gaza by the Hamas movement, and it reflects the viewpoint of their political convictions. Then there is the *Palestine Times* newspaper in English, which, however, is currently not published, and there is talk about a launch of two daily newspapers in Arabic.

The *Al Quds* newspaper has successfully continued publishing for more than half a century without interruption. It has succeeded in adapting with great sensitivity to changing political circumstances. It has good relations with the regime in Jordan and with influential members of the Palestinian Authority. Unlike other newspapers in Palestine, it is clearly hostile to the Israeli occupation.

According to its publishers, about 50,000 copies of *Al Quds* are distributed, but people who are familiar with the secrets of Palestinian journalism are calling this claim into question, saying that the level of distribution does not exceed 30,000 copies (Al-Zubaidi, 2004). Despite this discrepancy, the *Al Quds* is still the newspaper with the highest circulation in Palestine. Palestinian newspapers rely primarily on advertising, which in some cases has risen to more than 50% of the newspaper's content.

Al Quds is owned by the influential Abu Al Zolof family, and academics assert that it is managed in a family ownership way for pure profit (Khlof, 2006). *Al Quds* is read mainly by the elderly and is distributed widely in the area of the central West Bank in the towns of Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Bethlehem. In addition, it is distributed in Jordan.

Al Ayyam began publishing at the time the Palestinian Authority was founded in the mid-1990s. It has a liberal orientation and is read mainly by intellectuals, educated people, and the youth sector. *Al Ayyam* is read widely in the city of Ramallah, the center of Palestinian institutional work. Its publishers say that

25,000 copies are distributed in all governorates, whereas specialists estimate the circulation to be 10,000 copies maximum (Al-Zubaidi, 2004).

Al Ayyam has a good network of correspondents, selected editors work for it, and it attracts some of the best writers. *Al Ayyam* is issued by the Al Ayyam Company for Printing, Publishing, and Distribution, which is partially owned by the Al Masri family, who also have large investments in the sectors of telecommunications, services, and construction in Palestine and the Arab region. The editor-in-chief of *Al Ayyam* was a former advisor to the late President Yasser Arafat and is close to President Mahmoud Abbas.

Al Ayyam's revenues from the printing and distribution of supplements are considered to be considerable. *Al Ayyam* distributes approximately 21 supplements of tabloid size. Many of those supplements are sponsored by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or are funded by a private donor and deal with issues of development, women, youth, good governance, and so on. *Al Ayyam* also has a large income from printing school textbooks, which goes into the millions of copies annually, and other books and publications.

Al Hayat Al Jadida is partially funded by the government and has been described as the unofficial mouthpiece of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) (Al-Zubaidi, 2004). According to the publishers 10,000 papers are distributed, but according to the experts it is fewer than 7,000 copies. This newspaper is the cheapest, and its articles are critical and bold. Al-Zubaidi (2004) writes, "Although most of its staff have been on the payroll of the PNA since 1997, some journalists have been harassed and detained by security forces" (p. 70). *Al Hayat Al Jadida* is distributed primarily at the ministries and government organizations, but it also has a remarkable reception in poor areas of the Gaza Strip, the governorate of Hebron, Jenin, and Tulkarem. The newspaper has printing and other technical and administrative problems. Like the *Al Ayyam* newspaper, it was founded in the mid-1990s. Many distinguished journalists and those who work for Arab newspapers, magazines, and news agencies, and a large number of reporters and editors who are currently serving the *Al Ayyam* newspaper, worked earlier in *Al Hayat Al Jadida*. From there they moved to work in *Al Ayyam* because of its better administrative and professional conditions. *Al Hayat Al Jadida* is going through a difficult transitional stage, with a stifling financial crisis, as it moves toward privatization. The Palestinian Investment Fund intends to purchase a percentage of shares when the emergence of strategic partners eventuates. Some supplements are printed by *Al Hayat Al Jadida* but fewer than by *Al Ayyam*.

Palestine Times is the only English-language daily, but it is not being published currently. The first issue was published on November 27, 2006, and publication stopped in March 2007. Publishers say that they had planned to distribute 20,000 copies to embassies and international institutions in Palestine and Israel,

in addition to 5,000 distributed locally (Zaboun, 2006). According to informed sources, the publishers raised about US \$1 million to set up the paper. This newspaper is considered the most expensive. It therefore targets the elite and foreigners in the Palestinian community and Israel. Currently, its publishers are looking for funding to resume publication.

Magazines

Magazines in Palestine are characterized by the absence of strategic planning. Often they do not manage to publish more than 10 issues, although experts say the market is hungry for a well-planned social magazine.

The most important magazine, *Al Demokrati* (*The Democrat*), a weekly political headed by a former political editor, began publication in 2006. *Al Zarweya* *Al Eqtesadeyya* (*The Economic Corner*) is an economic and political magazine that began in 2006. *This Week in Palestine*, an English-language magazine distributed in hotels, restaurants, and tourist areas, specializes mainly in the publication of articles and issues relating to tourism in Palestine. *Fosta* magazine, which is issued in Jerusalem city, is a sensationalist magazine. Finally, there are magazines specializing in women's issues and domestic affairs, such as *Baytona* (*Our Home*) and others.

Palestinian magazines often suffer from lack of funding, despite making profits, and a lack of distinction. Still, some of these magazines are issued by civil associations and institutions and even political parties (mostly Muslim), even if these magazines proclaim otherwise.

Monthly Newspapers

There are about 20 monthly newspapers in Palestine, published by academic institutions and communities, specializing in areas such as youth, women, health, and the environment. The most important of these is the *Al Hal* (*The Situation*) newspaper published by the Media Development Center at Birzeit University. According to opinion polls, *Al Hal* newspaper is one of the most widely read newspapers in Palestinian society because it is courageous, critical, concise, and professional.

Partisan Newspapers

There are several partisan newspapers, most of them weeklies, such as the *Al Resala* (*The Mission*), which belongs to the Hamas movement.

Other Factors About the Palestinian Print Media Landscape

The print media market lacks precise statistics on the size of distribution, but the latest statistics issued by the Central Palestinian Census Office says that about 14% of Palestinians who are more than 10 years old read newspapers every day (9% males, 5% females).

It can be said that *Al Quds* is undisputedly the most important newspaper in terms of distribution, followed by *Al Ayyam* and then *Al Hayat Al Jadida*. However, a number of specialized academic studies classify *Al Ayyam* as number one in terms of professionalism, followed by *Al Hayat Al Jadida* and then *Al Quds*.

In some cases, the rates for commercial advertising for *Al Quds* can be twice the rate of *Al Ayyam* or *Al Hayat Al Jadida*. Most companies prefer to advertise in *Al Quds* because of its high circulation. Meanwhile, major firms such as the Palestinian Communication Group, Coca Cola, and banks prefer advertising in all three daily newspapers without exception.

RADIO

In addition to the official radio station, *Voice of Palestine*, more than 32 local private stations broadcast in Palestine, plus Israeli radio in Arabic and some Arab or Arabic-speaking stations, mainly *Radio SAWA*, *Radio Monte Carlo*, *BBC*, and the *Voice of the Arabs*.

Official Radio Station

Voice of Palestine is a continuation of the *Al Thawra (The Revaluation)* Palestinian Radio, which was broadcasting from different Arab capitals using multiple names. Broadcasting began at the early stages of the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. The station's buildings and equipment were destroyed by the Israeli occupation in 2002, which severely affected its audience size and pushed many of its well-known broadcasters to move on and work in Arab media outside Palestine. Currently, *Voice of Palestine* does not cover an area greater than the Ramallah governorate because of technical problems. Experts estimate that it needs hundreds of thousands of dollars to return to its previous range.

Private Radio Stations

More than 32 private radio station broadcast from the cities of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and attract the majority of the Palestinian public. *Generation 1*

radio station, which broadcasts from Ramallah, has the biggest audience, followed by some widely heard local radio stations, such as *Sound of Love* in Nablus and *Hebron Radio* in Hebron. Radio stations that broadcast in the cities of the West Bank often have a commercial approach, with music and news summaries taking up most of the broadcasting time. In the Gaza Strip, radio stations are affiliated with the major political parties and often are involved in the political controversy of these parties.

Arab and Arabic-Speaking Radio Stations

The *Voice of Israel* in Arabic still has a relatively high audience in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It is entirely funded by the Israeli government, and the advertising is by Israeli companies that market their products and services on the Palestinian market. Also the American Radio station *SAWA* (Radio Sawa, 2008) has a good audience penetration among the Palestinian youth, especially since it became available as a local FM station in 2003. The *BBC* and *Radio Monte Carlo* (Radio Monte Carlo, 2008) also command reasonable audience figures, especially among the elderly.

Statistics for 2006 indicate that 56.6% of Palestinians above the age of 10 listen to radio regularly, taking into consideration variations of this portion according to residential place and age difference; 69.5% of the citizens between the ages of 30 and 49 listen to radio regularly for 1 hour or more daily. The proportion of people listening to local radio stations rises sharply when political or important field events happen. Here radio benefits from being the fastest of all media to access and transfer information; this is shown particularly clearly in the Gaza Strip.

TELEVISION

Palestinians are the heaviest TV watchers in the region. Statistics from 2004 show that 93.4% of Palestinians have one or more TV sets. Among them, 29.3% watch the official Palestinian TV station daily (21.6% in the West Bank and 45.1% in Gaza), 47.1% own satellite dishes (42.6% in the West Bank and 51.6% in Gaza), and 81.6% in Gaza and 76% in the West Bank prefer the Qatari television station, *Al-Jazeera*.

It should be noted that, in the last 2 years, the percentage of satellite dish owners in Palestine has increased sharply. Also, two private satellite channels started their own broadcasting productions, the *Siraj Al Aqsa* (*Al-Aqsa Light*) channel, which is close to Hamas, and *Al Falastinya* (*The Palestinian*), which is expected to reflect a liberal orientation close to the Fatah movement.

Private TV Stations

There are nearly 30 private TV stations broadcasting from all of the major Palestinian cities. Ten of these stations have joined to form a local TV network under the name of *Ma'an (Together)* to produce news, interactive, social, and dramatic programs, often funded by foreign donors (Jallov, 2006). Some of the most important private TV stations are *Watan (Homeland)*, *Amwaj (Waves)*, and *Al Quds* Educational TV broadcasts from Ramallah; *Al Nawras* broadcasting from Hebron; *Gama* and *Atlas* from Nablus, and the *Bethlehem 2000 TV* broadcast from Bethlehem (Abdallah, 2007).

INTERNET

Several news agencies are available on the Internet, including the official Palestinian news agency *Wafa*, the *Ma'an* network, part of the previously mentioned TV network, and the TV services agency, *Ramatan*. There are also many partisan news sites. No precise figures exist about the usage of these sites, but Palestine is considered an area where the Internet is used widely in comparison with other developing countries. According to 2004 statistics, 40% of males and 31.5% of females above the age of 10 use the Internet (Karajah, 2005).

Summary: Media

Although there is a lack of recent and accurate statistics about the media in Palestine, it is certain that the media is shaping Palestinians' lives and is catching the attention of adults and children. This occurs to the extent that one can confidently speak of a media explosion being experienced in Palestinian areas. From time to time, new publications and new radio and TV stations are launched, especially after the significant political transformation that was brought about by the legislative electoral win for Hamas and its assumption of power. However, the next few years will bring about changes in the Palestinian media map, which require vigorous and critical observation for all who are concerned.

THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PALESTINIAN MEDIA

The Palestinian media faces enormous challenges primarily from the impact of the other media, particularly the Israeli media, which is directed toward the Palestinian people, with media messages and strategies that are carefully designed

and renewed in accordance with developments. The tasks incumbent on the Palestinian media are huge and difficult. The conflict rages on the question of the right of the Palestinian people for self-determination, and on the land and its destiny and future. This conflict is attempted to be resolved in the arena of media propaganda first before it is taken to the battlefield.

The Palestinian citizen is primarily concerned with the exceeding influence of the Israeli media on the domestic front. He is interested in responding to the violations brought about by Israeli media in the arena of world public opinion. Israeli media and the media biased in favor of Israel have, in Palestinian eyes, succeeded to a dangerous degree. Israeli control has reached the extent that it can violate Palestinian rights and retain at the same time the image of victim. As one journalist said, "Israeli tanks grind the children's bones and their declaration robs victim's speech" (Allaham, 2007).

In this situation, the Palestinian media face many questions. First and foremost, how can the Palestinian media be involved in this battle? Israeli media succeeded in linking national struggle and the Palestinian resistance to terrorism and elevating the Israeli demands to stop and terminate terrorism to greater prominence than the Palestinian request to end the occupation. Criticism of Israel and its colonization and war crimes are countered as being anti-Semitic. How then can Palestine become connected to the global awareness and have its battle seen as part of the battle for democracy, human rights, self-determination, against war, racism, domination, and aggression? How can Palestine connect to those values carriers, which cannot be believable without support of the Palestinian rights and opposition to the Israeli occupation, as said by the Israeli historian, Baruch Kimmerling (2006)? How can the Palestinian media discuss issues of society, the citizens' rights, democracy, the process of construction, and the factors that hold back this process by sabotage, corruption, and misuse of responsibility and governmental positions? Are the media in Palestine media for the homeland and society? Or are they media for the National Authority? These questions are partially answered by the reality of the media performance, the media institutions, and the laws governing the media.

The Law Governing the Work of the Media

The modified Basic Law of the National Authority has two articles, 19 and 17, that concern the law of freedom of expression and opinion. Article 19 states that there is "no prejudice against freedom of opinion. Everyone has the right to express and publish his opinion either by speech, writing, art, or other means of expression, taking into consideration law statements." Article 17 says, "The establishment of newspapers and other media is a right of all and guaranteed by law, and all funding sources are subject to control by law." Freedom of audiovisual media, print media,

printing and publishing, distribution and broadcasting, and for workers in media, is guaranteed in accordance with this law and the relevant laws.

What is more, according to Article 37, the prohibition of censorship on media means that warning, suspense, forfeiting, revoking, or restricting any of these media is not allowed. These can only occur according to the law as a result of judicial pronouncement. The same statement is mentioned in Articles 22 and 23 of the Palestinian law, which has been approved by the Palestinian Legislative Council in the second session. These two articles are based on Article 19 of the International Charter for Civil and Political Rights, which organizes civil and political legislations for the majority of the world's countries that have signed this charter.

Historically, the undermining of the Palestinian legislation began when Palestinian President Yasser Arafat issued a decree to cancel all laws that had been issued by the military administration since 1967. This decision was taken in May 1994. On June 17, 1995, the Authority Council approved the Law of Printing and Publication, issued on behalf of Chairman of the Executive Committee, President of the National Authority, Yasser Arafat. This law remains in force today, without it having been presented to or discussed in the Legislative Council, and this is the first flaw in the status of this law. Jallof (2006) explains further:

The media in Palestine are existing in a de-facto legal vacuum, with an only rudimentary legal framework in vigour. The one recent media law existing covers only the print media and was expected to be a first step in a regulatory process initiated by the Ministry of Information, which was created by decree by President Arafat in 1994. This process, however, stalled thereafter. The Israeli military laws passed since 1967 were also declared invalid by Arafat in 1994, leaving a situation of legal confusion, where Ottoman and British Mandate law was applied in the civil area and Jordanian and Egyptian law for penal punishment. [sic] (p. 10)

The Law of Printing and Publication introduced judgments about printing and publishing issues but did not extend to audiovisual media or the Internet, which were then in their infancy. The reason for this is that the Palestinian law was affected by the Jordanian laws and old Egyptian laws, which did not include the audiovisual media at that time either. Consequently, the Ministry of Information has been forced to launch a bill for audiovisual media, but this bill was not approved and is still not passed despite it being referred to in the licensing process as if it were a working law.

The reason for the anarchic media situation lies, according to Jallof, in the unresolved political situation:

Israel owns the air and frequencies according to the Oslo agreement, allowing only space for the Government broadcaster PBC, PSC and Voice of Palestine. This means in principle that the total of some 60 small local TVs and local Radios would have to

ask sending permission from Israel. They have not done this and the PA [Palestinian Authority] has—in truth against its own will—accepted, because it was a strong case of civil disobedience against Israel. (Jallov, 2006, p. 10)

Does the Law of Printing and Publication Guarantee Freedom of Expression and Opinion?

First, Articles 2, 3, and 4 allow freedom of journalism, expression, opinion, and the search for information. However, this type of legalization is less than the prescribed unequivocal level that was stated in the articles of the Basic Law mentioned previously. The first articles deal with freedom as a right: “The right of expression,” “the right of establishment of newspapers is guaranteed for all,” and “freedom of media means was guaranteed by the law.” On the other side, the Law of Printing and Publication does not consider freedom as a right, and no other laws guarantee it. There is a difference between an allowed freedom extended by one side to the other and a freedom that is considered a natural binding right.

Second, the Law of Printing and Publication allows the search for information and news from sources without raising it to the level of freedom of information. Article 6 states that: “The official bodies work to ease journalist’s task in offering access to its programs and projects.” This loose and vague article restricts the freedom of access to information. That freedom needs a special law to “guarantee citizens’ right of access to official information,” as is the case with many nations that have also introduced special freedom of information legislation.

Third, Article 7 places explicit restrictions on the freedoms approved by the previous articles through the statements that the media must “Refrain from publishing anything that is contrary to the principles of freedom and national responsibility and respect for the truth” and must “not breach Palestinian ethics, values and traditions.” All of these concepts are wide open to interpretation because of the imprecise nature of culture and awareness. If there is a discrepancy, the interpretation and opinion given by the authorities is accepted as the dominant opinion and is adopted. Consequently, these articles allow the authorities to prevent publication, limit free expression, and pursue punishment.

Fourth, Article 37 prohibits the dissemination of confidential information about security apparatuses and prohibits publication of articles that would harm the national unity. It also prohibits the publication of the proceedings of secret meetings of the National Council and the Authority’s Ministers Council “unless the Legislative Council exists.” However, the Legislative Council has failed in the last 3 years to organize a meeting for all the members because of the problems between our political parties. The article also prohibits the publication of materials contrary to ethics and morals. All of these topics can be controversial and can

afford more than one interpretation, especially when related to harming national unity. For example, if there is a controversy about the national forces, does criticizing their situation harm national unity? In addition, the records of parliaments in all democratic countries are available to all, and there are few restrictions in accessing these records. Article 37 allows control of media material to a level that affects the freedom stated in the Articles 2 and 4.

Fifth, Article 33 of the Law of Printing and Publication requires the owner or manager responsible for the printing house to deposit four copies of each issue at the office of Printing and Publication before they are distributed to the public. This requirement imposes a kind of censorship on publications and provides an opportunity for the Ministry of Information to block distribution or withhold permission to print if it so chooses. This article refrains from asking the law to proceed with censorship. However, because of the presence of a later censorship, this article implicitly allows censorship if the ministry wants to apply it.

In places where there is a section in a government department specializing in censorship, it checks and revises everything published in newspapers, periodical magazines, books locally printed or imported from outside, and artistic works. This section works according to censorial program with priorities identified by the minister; also, this program is consistent with the general policy of the government. Article 33, in contrast, makes this an unpredictable process.

Sixth, the law does not clarify judicial procedures concerning the application of these laws, which means that the courts and judicial processes cannot take on the responsibility of maintaining law and ensuring adherence to it. The law stands silent in front of the issues of judicial censorship, and reverting to the courts in cases of encroachment of rights, the journalist is left without safeguards. Nevertheless, Articles 43 and 48 state the range of sanctions imposed on anyone who violates the law, which extend from offering an apology to paying a fine of up to 6,000 Jordanian dinars, or 6 months imprisonment.

Seventh, the Law of Printing and Publication "opened the door to media control and weakened freedom of expression" (Awkeel, 2005). Yet the government and the security apparatuses do not even obey this law when undertaking steps against the media, thus enforcing "self censorship, which is the worst among censorship types" (Abdallah, 2005).

The strange paradox is that the authority can say that it allows freedom of expression and opinion, that there is no prior censorship, that it allows access to resources of information, and that it allows pluralism. Yet it makes the media walk the way it wants, and it makes the media talk along the lines of its vision. "The Authority keeps all the doors opened in all directions, and it is not committed to a specific thing. No commitment to freedom and no insistence on overt repression" (Ibrahim, 2006, p. 11).

Accountability and Censorship Systems in Media Institutions

If the media were the fourth estate, it could keep a watchful eye over the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary. As it is, there are no guarantees in the practice of censorship of the media. In other words, what are the benchmarks that can ensure that censoring of the media is done fairly? The system, as it stands, enables corruption to penetrate in the media.

Deals have been made between media and governments in other countries, too. For example, in the United States, some media institutions have distorted facts and realities in coordination with the Pentagon, which led to popular support for the war in Iraq. In the Palestinian situation, the governmental or external support to media can be linked to justifications of certain procedures and violations. At times when some newspapers have received support from Arab States and Arab resources, this support has been reflected in the stance of the newspaper toward their supporters and their policies.

Palestinian media institutions lack the minimum components, such as a transparent legal framework, media management planning, and necessary specifications for the journalistic profession. These institutions are overcrowded by media workers who are hired in indirect ways far beyond the institutions' capacity to use them adequately. Instead of answering a genuine need, the media workers' employment can be seen as masked unemployment. Qualified people—and there are few—become like unqualified people, which leads to a brain drain from those institutions, or pushes them to search for another job because of the lack of salaries. There are no administrative councils, editorial boards, or plans. In addition, one of the assessed standards in the work of any media institution's cadre is its degree of harmony with the institution's manager. In Palestine, the institution manager has extraordinary power to control performance of staff who thus turn into obedient servants.

A weakness of field journalists is noted, and thus journalists with specific competencies are rare, especially those who can prepare investigative reports and journalistic stories for audio, visual, and print media. This comes in addition to the extreme vulnerability in the area of addressing the issues of corruption, accountability, transparency, and prevalence for timid criticism. In most cases, journalists do not even reach the permitted level of criticism regarding social and political issues. The majority of editors follow the conservative school culturally and socially. They are not noted for their sense of criticism, bravery, or initiative. This reflects on their news. For example, one can find some editors who agree with violence against women. Given this pressure, working in media institutions makes it difficult to uphold a professional performance.

The Ministry of Information was not the reference point for the media, such as radio, TV, and news agencies. These institutions followed the Executive Authority

(the president) and did not have the management boards for evaluation and supervision. However, the new structure of the Ministry of Information contains an internal censorship unit. Its function is to "monitor the functioning of public administrations of the Ministry, and to scrutinize the level to which instructions, laws, and regulations are obeyed" (N. Ahmmad, personal communication, March 5, 2006). The structure of the Ministry of Information includes a legal section to follow up the implementation and application of the Law of Printing and Publication. There is also the general censorship department, whose function it is to "examine and audit everything that is published in newspapers, magazines and printed or imported books" (N. Ahmmad, personal communication, March 5, 2006). However, these departments' and sections' decisions are not binding on the media institutions (Okal, 2006).

PROTECTION FOR JOURNALISTS

The only entity that specializes in the protection of journalists is the Union of Palestinian Journalists founded in 1979, which purports to have taken on the task of defending the interests of journalists, establishing a social system that respects journalists' rights, and supporting journalists who face the oppression of the authorities of occupation. The union also proposes cooperating with official authorities with regard to the amendment of laws. The union describes itself as a nongovernmental organization dependent on members' fees and donations. However, it has not once revealed the sizes or sources of these donations. Many journalists do not consider the union independent from the Palestinian Authority, evidence being its lack of response to the authority's violations of the freedom of journalism, with the exception of occasional and subtle criticism for the sake of saving face. Thus, in its current form, the union does not defend the rights of journalists apart from issuing statements and declarations against the violations of the occupation on the organizations of the media, and participating in media activities and conferences on the Arabic and International levels. Settling for this representative role demonstrates the crisis of the union. It means that Palestinian journalists are represented overseas in a patriarchal old-fashioned way, and at home any criticism of the union is rejected as stepping on the toes of the nationalistic role of journalism regardless of whether this deprives journalists of the means to fight for their rights.

What is certain, and to an extent agreed on, is that the absence of union action means the absence of moral and ethical standards, resulting in poor professional performance. The challenge that journalists face is finding a body or institution that will take on the task of defending their rights and developing the moral and

material rewards necessary for them to do their work (Laffé, 2006). How can a journalist be expected to promote values such as integrity, transparency, accountability, and the right to freely obtain information when he or she is not free and is unable to practice democracy within the profession? There are few journalists in the union. Especially those from within the more professional and experienced circles have avoided the union knowing that it does not represent them or their work or their interest. There is skepticism regarding the legitimacy of its 1999 elections concerning the members of its board, which has not yet been confirmed, as well as the absence of serious attempts to prepare for new elections, even long after a date was agreed on. Even now, there does not seem to be any intention of holding them.

Journalists are interested in overcoming the union's crisis and the paralysis it suffers. They have formed a preparatory committee from within, and they have tried to organize elections without the union leadership. They also attempt to offer a model of an internal system that specifies the conditions of membership for journalists and the qualities that should be present in the candidates for the directors' board and position of union leader. In case of the union's refusal to hold these elections that the Legislative Council's document stipulates, they demand that an independent committee be formed that will organize meetings for journalists of all sectors. It will also discuss the methods available to protect the freedom of the media, to take into account the role of computerized media, to discuss and crystallize journalists' defense mechanisms in the presence of judicial authorities, as well as to press the legislative council to issue a law that grants citizens and journalists the right to uncover and use information.

CHALLENGES FACING THE MEDIA IN PALESTINE

What Can Be Said About the Ethics of Palestinian Journalism?

Ethics cannot be taught. Never have we heard of a university that teaches it successfully, nor of a professional training program that leads journalists through the doorway to a mastery of the ethics of the profession.

Media students at Birzeit University were asked what they would do if someone injured a foot in front of their camera lens. Would they go on with their job of filming? Or would they leave the news story to someone else to help the person, who could lose his or her foot or his or her life if they did not offer help?

The students hesitated, and their responses clashed. Someone said, "Of course I would help save the person because his or her life is more important than the news." Then they were asked: "If you happened to be present during the invasion of the Jenin refugee camp, where all media sources were reporting that 27

soldiers had been killed, but you had proof that 60 Palestinians and 17 soldiers were actually killed, how would you use that information? Would you report it?" The answers to these questions are difficult—as difficult as achieving objectivity and ethical standards in the media—because journalism is a message rather than a mere profession, and that is where the difficulty lies.

The Palestinian journalist, prior to being an *Al-Jazeera* or *BBC* reporter or a writer for an international agency, is a human, and that holds two possibilities. Either he or she is ethical, and therefore a professional journalist, or he or she may not include morals as part of life. We must admit that it is difficult to achieve objectivity. However, it is our aim to do so.

What Do Palestinian Journalists Do With the Profession's Code of Honor?

It has been shown through experience that the code's stipulations are different from what occurs in practice. Theoretically, the journalist is responsible before the law and the readers or listeners, and his or her aim is to search for important facts of news and issues and publish them fully serving justice and plurality. Practically, however, the journalist must answer to his or her superiors, and the message must coincide with the policy of the institution served, with the aim of maintaining the source of livelihood. Theoretically, the journalist must check the validity of his facts in every possible way to avoid unreliable intuition. There is no excuse for a journalist to intentionally distort the truth. Practically, however, we do read, watch, and hear an abundance of news where the truth is lost.

Theoretically, the journalist must not exaggerate by using words that carry no information but aim to charge the audience emotionally. Often what we do watch, hear, and read is oratory. Some people applaud the reporter who toys with their emotions and call him a hero.

Theoretically, the journalist must protect children from material that will impact on their psychological development. Practically, however, our children see and hear death and disasters. The most tangible result of this is an increase in bed-wetting.

Theoretically, the journalist must fight racism and religious fanaticism, support the case for equality between women and men, and respect the laws related to these issues, taking into account his or her right to criticize these laws. Practically, some journalists claim to be supporters of women's rights, but we rarely see or read anything daring that journalists have to say about change in favor of women.

Theoretically, the journalist must respect the national interest as well as the opinions that are prevalent in society. These should not steer him or her away from raising controversial issues important to society, knowing that the explanation of the national interest is not exclusively up to the ruling authorities to give, nor to the

opposition or the social movements, but is formed by them collectively. Practically, we have not succeeded in agreeing on a definition of *national interest*, so the term has been stretched in so many ways according to the varying interests that it has been stretched out of shape.

The 2004 annual report issued by "Journalists Without Borders" gave Palestinian journalism place 84 for objectivity and Israel place 92, with 0 being the closest a country could come to being objective. This is good news to us because it is the result of the Palestinian journalists' presence in the field not only as journalists but also as individuals, who care about the citizens of society. There are successful journalists in Nablus, Bethlehem, or Jenin, to whom people go to for help and who can be trusted to lead the way with their news, advice, and help. This is something to be proud of.

The road to absolute objectivity remains difficult to obtain, but a minimum of objectivity is necessary.

MEDIA AND CHANGE

What Are the Effective Media Text Criteria?

The question is, will Palestinians one day be able to perform a cosmetic surgery on our journalistic materials? Will we be able to get rid of incitement and be in line with international resolutions and international legitimacy and human rights standards? This might help in winning international sympathy for Palestinian rights and improve the image of the Palestinians' position in the eyes of Israelis, who will put pressure on their government to give the Palestinian people their legitimate rights. Then this international sympathy, in addition to the Israelis' understanding of our rights as Palestinians, may provide better opportunities for peace between the Israelis and us.

Mr. Aref Hijawi, director of the Media Institute, believes that it is possible to reach media decency if we want:

Balance: Present a balanced view and do not to broadcast a unilateral point of view.

Sobriety: Do not send a letter with emotions that constitute a deliberate provocation.

Calm: Do not exaggerate when complaining.

Courage and Candor: Do not black out certain aspects due to bribes or hide facts due to supposed death threats.

Clarity: Do not resort to obscure language.

Honesty: Offer sincerity and accuracy of information.

Harmony: Do not incite racial revenge.

Examples of Violations of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Due to censorship and self-censorship, the Israeli press and the Western press know more about Palestine than we do. Here are some of the samples of violations up to June 30, 2007: 13 journalists were martyred by fire of the occupation forces; 398 journalists were injured by shooting and subjected to beatings and other assaults; 90 were shot at but not injured; 432 journalists have faced restrictions (i.e., they could not practice their work); 105 cases of assault on media institutions; and 84 cases of assault on press equipment (International Solidarity Movement, 2007).

Apart from these violations, licenses were withdrawn, publications and equipment confiscated, press offices attacked, and people arrested or detained because of their opinions.

The Teaching and Training of Journalism in Palestine

Palestine is the home of 10 universities: Birzeit University, the University of Bethlehem, Al Quds University, Hebron University, Al Najah University, Al Aqsa University, University of Al-Quds for open learning, Al Azhar University, American University, and Bolitechnic University. The first seven universities teach journalism and media (Jallov, 2006).

Annually, about 300 students, of which 50% are female, graduate from the faculties of journalism in the Palestinian universities. Yet the media market in Palestine needs only 30 journalists each year according to a study by an academic specializing in media research at the University of Birzeit (Jallov, 2006; Mohammad, 2006;). Some of those who cannot be absorbed by the Palestinian media become journalists for other Arabic and international news organizations, or they work for the Palestinian Authority in different jobs, such as public relations. Yet others work in the family business or return to their villages.

The academic professional level varies between the Palestinian universities that teach media and journalism. In Bethlehem University, for example, journalism is a minor study, and there are no radio and TV studios to teach students the techniques of photography, recording, and montage, whereas at Birzeit University, there is a TV studio equipped with all the latest technical facilities needed for teaching students. A short time ago, the working system on editing was updated to the digital Avid system. Further, the radio unit at Birzeit University has a

broadcasting frequency and a radio station for the students, where they can broadcast for 4 hours a day. A cooperation agreement was recently signed between Radio Birzeit and Radio Mont Carlo's Arabic-speaking program, where Radio Monte Carlo will broadcast on Radio Birzeit's frequency in Palestine. The students will cover 4 hours of broadcasting a day, and Radio Monte Carlo will cover the remaining 20 hours (Birzeit University, 2007).

Generally, media departments at Palestinian universities have witnessed a rise in student interest in the recent years. This drove Al Najah University and Al Aqsa University in Gaza to equip media colleges with the required modern technology. The growing demand for journalism studies can be explained by the political circumstances in Palestine, but also because a journalism career is seen as possibly leading to fame and money. This is because Palestine is a political hot spot, to which news agencies, satellite TV channels, and Arabic and international broadcasters are attracted. Palestine has offices and correspondents for many news agencies that are interested in the Middle East and the Arab countries in general, and the Palestinian issue and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in particular.

It is worth recalling that, when the Palestinian legislative elections took place in 1996, thousands of journalists were in Palestine at that time. It was difficult for anyone to find a room in a hotel in Ramallah city. Thus, many Palestinians in Ramallah rented their houses to international journalists. Also, some Palestinian journalists invited their colleagues to stay at their houses.

MEDIA TRAINING PROGRAMS

In Palestine, there are many media training centers, the most prominent of all being the Media Development Center at Birzeit University, which, according to the evaluation of the Swedish Development Agency (SIDA), is the best center, introducing media training programs continuously and regularly not in Palestine only but also in the Arab world (Jallov, 2006). Since 1992, the Media Development Center has started to introduce media training courses in cooperation with its main partner, the Swedish Institution for training of journalists (FOJO), and other partners such as Deutsche Welle, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, UNESCO, and other partners. The topics of training courses, estimated to be 22 each year, include print and digital journalism, radio, TV, journalism ethics, and media law. Approximately 350 journalists benefit from these courses. Some of those journalists started their careers after joining the Media Development Center courses.

GAZA 2007

2007 was a turning point for the people of Gaza. Because Hamas controls the Gaza Strip, everything belonging to the opposing Fatah party has been closed—its radio and TV stations, its news websites, and its media agencies. This has led to a widespread sense of instability among the press crew in the Strip. Above all, these decisions seem to be motivated by Hamas' desire to control the press. They are trying to give themselves the tools that allow them to legally ban news media that shows too much support for the Palestinian Authority. Most of the reporters are banned from covering the events in Gaza, particularly to the Palestinian Broadcasting Channel (PBC) and Palestine Voice radio station.

This complicated situation has prompted most of the well-known journalists to migrate from the Strip, especially if they received serious threats. Besides the atmosphere of fear that is sweeping journalists after the closure of several news organizations, assaults, beatings and arrests negatively affect the media in the Strip. For example, Saif el den Shahan, a reporter for Al Arabya, has left Gaza and asked for political asylum in Sweden after the bombing of the Al Arabya office in Gaza.

Similarly, Jamela Abu Shanab, a correspondent to El Hura TV channel, has requested political asylum in France, while the vice chairman of the press syndicate *Tawfiq*, Abu Khoussa, and the general director of the PBC in Gaza left Gaza for Ramallah, accompanied by five technical staff in the PBC. In addition, Moner Abu Rizi, the director of *El Hyat El Jdeda* newspaper in Gaza, asked for a political asylum in Norway after being arrested, tortured, and held for 23 days in a Hamas jail.

It is noticeable that, despite what the Palestinian journalists had to face from the Israeli occupation during their press work, they did not consider immigration, whereas now more than six prominent journalists have chosen to leave. One of the results of these coercive measures imposed by Hamas is to force Palestinian journalists to censor themselves. They are also helping to delay the return of foreign journalists, who pulled out of the Strip after British journalist Alan Johnston's abduction. Pluralism and media diversity are threatened by these kinds of practices.

CONCLUSION

The situation in Palestine is highly complex. The challenges faced by the media and by media training are tied in with the unresolved political and economic

challenges of Palestine. As far as journalism education is concerned, much progress has been made, as the programs at Palestinian universities, in particular Birzeit, show (Jallov, 2006). But this progress does not necessarily flow on to the Palestinian media. Given the inadequacy of a legal framework that would ensure a professional media, and the financial fragility of Palestinian media outlets, it is still difficult to carry through the lessons learned during journalism training.

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